NATIONAL RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN POST-GENOCIDE AGAINST TUTSI IN RWANDA

ABSTRACT

National reconciliation is a vague and 'messy' process. In post-genocide Rwanda, it presents special difficulties that stem from the particular nature of the Rwandan crisis and the popular participation that characterized the Rwandan atrocities. This article outlines the main approaches being used in Rwanda to achieve reconciliation, highlighting some of the major obstacles faced by these institutions. It then goes on to argue that certain 'Silences' are being imposed on the reconciliation process, including the failure to prosecute alleged RPA crimes, the lack of debate on, and the instrumentalization of, Rwanda's 'histories', the collective stigmatization of all Hutu as génocidaires, and the papering over of societal cleavages through the 'outlawing' of 'divisionism'. The role economic development can play in the reconciliation process is also discussed. Given the Government of Rwanda's central role in the reconciliation process and its progressive drift towards authoritarianism, the article ends with a reflection on the worrisome parallels between the pre and post-genocide socio-political contexts.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the wake violence on a societal scale, finding the right balance between justice and healing, retribution and forgiveness, tribunals and truth commissions, remembering and 'moving on' is a messy if not impossible goal.

As Martha Minow points out, "no response can ever be adequate when your son has been killed by police ordered to shoot at a crowd of children, when you have been dragged out of your home, interrogated, and raped in a wave of "ethnic cleansing"; or when your brother who struggled against a repressive government has disappeared and left only a secret police file, bearing no clue to his final resting place." If anything, this is all the more true in cases of genocide, where one has to factor in the "terrifying existential crisis faced by survivors of genocide", their brush with the attempted annihilation of "not only your self, but also everything that constitutes your world, everything that makes your life worth living – your work, your family, your children – all that was on the point of being wiped out, too."

Reconciliation is a vague concept. In the wake of mass violence, there is no goal post past which 'reconciliation' has been achieved. My premise is that legal (prosecutorial) instruments, striking political compromises, publicly acknowledging the wrongs inflicted on victims, and other measures, as 'messy' as they may be, are all more acceptable than doing nothing. I label 'doing nothing' unacceptable first because of its "shocking implication that the perpetrators in fact succeeded". Indeed, silence makes us complicit bystanders to the perpetrators of yesterday. Secondly, inaction is unacceptable because it leaves grievances, fears of reprisals, and cultures of impunity to fester, encouraging cyclical outburst of violence by the perpetrators of tomorrow.

Sadly, this is an accurate description of the periodic violent crises in Burundi and Rwanda. 'Reconciliation', the umbrella term I will use to refer to this series of messy compromises, though it may be inconceivable or offensive to some, is thus the only sustainable and genuine form of prevention in societies that have

undergone mass violence. In this article, I will outline Rwanda's attempts at striking the balance between justice and healing, vengeance and forgiveness. I will then describe the 'Silences' imposed on Rwanda's 'national unity' project and end with a reflection on the worrisome parallels emerging between the pre-genocide and post-genocide contexts. Throughout, I will emphasise that Rwanda's conflict is qualitatively different not only in its genocidal character, but also in the overwhelming receptivity, and initiative, the organizers of the genocide found from below.